

The National Interagency Complex Incident Management Organization Study

Background

The National Interagency Complex Incident Management Organization (NIMO) Study is the culmination of work and analysis performed by the interagency National Incident Management Options Team, chartered in 2003 by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group to:

- Examine organizational alternatives that will balance both local resource management work and complex incident management responsibilities.
- Review the original 2000 report “*An Agency Strategy for Fire Management*” and evaluate alternative implementation strategies for a National Incident Management Organization (NIMO).
- Develop recommendations and evaluate their ramifications, impacts, feasibility, cost and effectiveness.
- Develop specific implementation options available to the interagency fire community.
- Ensure that these recommendations and implementation options meet overall agency resource goals and objectives, the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, and the National Fire Plan.

The Management Options Team has representatives from: the USDA Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fire Administration, and Alaska Division of Forestry.

Several Incident Management Options Analyzed and Considered

During its review and analysis process, the National Incident Management Options (NIMO) Team analyzed several incident management options by cost, ability to implement, and affect on the various issues and concerns identified both in previous reports and from current reviewer feedback. Through this extensive study, the Management Options Team determined that these proposed NIMO options would not:

- Be affordable—based on the current funding levels and structure.
- Increase the capacity at the local unit level to complete today’s—and tomorrow’s—necessary natural resource work needs without significant additional investments.
- Significantly reduce the reliance on the agencies’ “militia.”
- Provide a career path for employees interested in working in large incident management. With teams being comprised of full time Incident Management Team personnel, a gap would develop between large incident management skills at the local level and the full time teams.

The Management Options Team concluded that implementation of a full NIMO option would not be feasible. The team further determined, however, that hiring and developing a small number of employees with large incident management as their primary responsibility *would* result in significant benefits.

Setting a Foundation for Future Success

When examining complex systems, no one simple solution will ever fully address the variety of issues that beset incident management. While several incident management options were analyzed and considered, this study’s Nine Key Implementation Recommendations—some of which may initially seem unrelated to incident management—together with its recommended Organizational Option, are intended to serve as a framework for the success and effectiveness of both incident management and aggressive landscape-scale vegetation management into the future. The Organizational Option’s goal is to implement a small, permanent, professional incident management organization focused on leadership, safety, cost efficiency, and training.

Nine Key Implementation Recommendations to Ensure Success

The success of this study's recommended option is predicated on planning and executing an aggressive landscape-scale vegetative management program and implementing these nine critical recommendations. The intent is to improve the management of complex incidents while simultaneously helping to maintain the availability of resource and wildland fire personnel to accomplish the local units' responsibilities.

Improved Capacity and Capability: Change federal agency policy to require employee participation on/or in support of incident management.

Type 3 Incident Management Teams: Significantly increase the number of interagency Type 3 IMTs.

Training: Streamline the NWCG fire training and qualifications program.

National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group IMT

Management: The National MAC becomes responsible for the standardization and mobilization of Type 1 and Type 2 IMTs.

Legal Authorities: Given the adoption of both the National Response Plan and the National Incident Management System, local, state, and federal agencies across America will be trained in a common system of incident management.

Non-Traditional Partnerships: Actively seek partnerships with other federal agencies to improve capacity for the development and utilization of both fire and non-fire incident management personnel.

Improved Hiring Authority: Reduce dependency on retirees and improve the temporary emergency hiring authorities.

Standardized Contracts: Improve efficiencies in wildland fire management.

Complex Incident Management: Develop a new model for managing complex incidents that utilizes social values, significant resource values, and cost benefits in the decision making process.

The Recommended Organizational Option:

Implement a small, permanent professional incident management organization focused on leadership, safety, cost efficiency, and training.

This organization would be led by a well-trained and focused cadre of professional incident managers with complex incident management as the primary focus of their positions. While a range of methods is available to accomplish this goal, the essential components required for success include:

- A strong core of fulltime Command and General Staff available year round for incident management.
- Having clearly-defined consistent performance expectations and utilization standards for these incident management positions.
- Seven teams of Command and General Staff stationed across the country near major jetports associated with geographic area coordination centers.
- The geographic area serving a significant role during low incident periods for utilizing these teams to manage the agencies' other needs, including: training, quality assurance activities, complex landscape fuel projects or other resource management work.
- Developing a monitoring plan to analyze the program's effectiveness and efficiencies to determine the need to continue, increase or decrease the program.

An "Interagency Implementation Strategy" will also be required to address specific aspects of this recommended organizational option, including: chain-of-command, pay/grade structure, methods for including state/local government participation, duty stations, and administrative support structure.